

Chapter 1081

He sat back down and threw a casual glance my way. “Judging from the way you look... let me guess, we’re being held captive by Armond?”

My brows knitted into a frown after seeing him so unbothered. What the heck is he doing? “How are you taking this so calmly? We’re literally trapped here, yet you seem relaxed. Aren’t you afraid of being killed by Armond?”

He chuckled as he looked back up at me. “So Armond is now a bloodthirsty murderer who kills anyone in his way? Well, you’re probably refusing to give him something he wants then.”

At this, my shoulders tensed. How does he know so much?

No point lying then. I pursed my lips and replied, “It’s just a sandalwood box that my grandma gave me. He wanted it, but I said no, so he locked me here. The rest is history.”

Deep laughter rumbled from him while his gaze met mine again. “Is it important?”

I nodded and explained, “A little. The sandalwood box holds a contract between my grandma and a major gasoline-producing country. That contract allows the Murphys to take advantage of the

low oil prices and bulk purchase petroleum, which they'll make a profit out of later on."

"I see." His eyes narrowed at me before he advised, "I think you should give it to him since there's no sentimental value behind it. Plus, it's not like the Murphys are the only ones benefitting from this. The whole country will benefit from the petroleum deal. So why the hesitance?"

"I don't mind giving the box to the Murphys, just not to Armond!" I stifled a growl at him. "Ashton visited A City to dig up all of Armond's past dirty businesses, so Armond will get what's coming to him. I know the Murphys are involved in the competitive gasoline market, but Armond isn't the only Murphy capable of running the business. I'll eventually hand them the box once Armond is locked up behind bars."

He frowned, trying to comprehend the reason behind my actions. "So, you're not giving it to Armond because all of his bad deeds will be forgiven if he secures a gasoline deal with Meudari; Because then, Ashton's evidence will mean nothing as people will adore Armond for boosting the nation's fuel economy."

I nodded, "That kind of sums it up."

An understanding look flashed briefly on his face before he stared off into the space. "You hate Armond that much?" I heard from Nora that he and you used to be close, so how'd you two end up as enemies?"

“Life had different plans for us,” I shrugged.

“So you’re gonna ruthlessly force him into a dead end?” a voice startled me from behind. My head whipped around to see who it was; it was Nora, whom I haven’t seen in a while. She looked more elegant now in her fox-fur shawl as she glared at me with disappointment. “He already surrendered A City to you Fullers. Since then, he returned to his turf here in K City and hasn’t done anything bad. Why won’t you let him live?”

When did she get here?

I brushed my shock off and spoke casually, “What are you doing in K City? You didn’t even call to let me know you were coming.”

That prompted a sharp retort from her. “There’s nothing to say between us. I just happened to bump into you. Speaking of, why are you here? Don’t want to return what rightfully belongs to the Murphys?

My lips twitched with disdain at her. Rightfully theirs? “This doesn’t belong to the Murphys,” I snarled. “I don’t know why you’re here, Nora, but I’m sure you know that Armond doesn’t love you and that he’s only using you to get what he wants. Must you continue to lie to yourself?”

“That’s none of your concern. I don’t need you to explain whether he truly cares for me,” her gaze flickered in another direction. “You

should give him that contract because he really needs it. I know that he wronged you guys in the past, but getting that contract is a matter of life and death for him. Can't you give it to him?"

She wasn't making sense at all. I couldn't help but sigh at how blinded she was in helping Armond. "You should get your facts checked before telling me what to do. And Nora, don't forget who you are and your values as an individual. It's not wise to lose yourself whilst chasing after some unrequited love."

I didn't know what else to say after seeing the harsh determination in her eyes.

Sure enough, she refused to give in. She looked at me and softened her voice, "You Fullers have already gotten all the glory in the world. You don't need what's in that box, so there's no point holding onto it. Why won't you hand it over to Armond and help him out?"

"Scarlett, we'll always be friends, so can't you do this favor for me? I know Armond hurt you guys in the past, but those times are over now. And you guys turned out fine anyway, so why not let bygones be bygones? Help him out just this once. I'm sure that Armond will get along with Ashton once he gets past this hurdle. We'll do anything you ask after this, hmm? Please, Scarlett?"

Chapter 1082

Nora drooped her shoulders and stared glassy-eyed at me.

My lips pressed into a thin line. I averted her stare by looking over to Holden, who was staring back at me with an uninterested expression. His eyes bore into mine, hinting that he wanted no part in any of this.

Then Nora's hand clamped around my wrist, and her nails tore my flesh apart like a bear trap while she wailed, "I'm begging you, Scarlett. I'll do anything you ask me to; I'll even convince my grandpa to hand over the Oberick family business to you and Ashton. Please, Scarlett, I'll do whatever it takes as long as you promise to help Armond. Just this time."

An oncoming headache pounded at my temples, drawing my brows into a deep frown. "What are you thinking! Do you even know what you're saying? How could you sacrifice your pride and get on your knees for some heartless, uncaring man?"

Nora's eyes swelled and darkened into a deep red. "Scarlett, you've misunderstood Armond. He's not the villain that you say he is. You've got it all wrong. I'll call him over, and he'll explain how things actually went down."

At her bold correction, that annoying headache grew into an electric pain behind my eyes. I couldn't help but bark out, "How dare you expect me to forgive him? You think you know everything, huh? Well,

your loverboy orchestrated the car accident and abducted Ashton, then almost froze him to death in the refrigerating chamber. He did all that to obtain trading rights to the Taylor family's port. Do you know that? How would you feel if you were in my shoes? If you knew that Armond did all that to Ashton, what would you truly do? Here you are, preaching to me about how he's misunderstood and asking me to forgive him... but have you ever considered my feelings?

"You say that we're best friends, yet you put me through the pain of losing my child. All because you called me, saying that you were drunk at Imperial Hotel. You knew that I would go to you. Then you used my kindness against me and caused my miscarriage... Do you even know how much the baby that you murdered meant to me? The doctors say that I'll never be able to conceive again, and it's all because of your phone call, that one dreaded call that stole my child from me. Tell me, Nora, do you not care about the lives of others? Because as long as you're not the one suffering, then none of it matters? Because only your problems trump over anyone else's?"

I never blamed her for my child's death as I was equally responsible. However, she shouldn't have pointed fingers at me and said that I misunderstood the whole situation and acted so condescendingly by telling me what to do. Her shamelessness ticked me off so much that it reddened my ears.

Hence, I couldn't bite back my burning resentment any longer. The woman before me was no one worth saving, even if she was once my dearest friend.

Nora's eyes swelled as if they were going to fall out at any moment. She gripped white-knuckled onto my clothes and begged, "I know what I did was wrong, but it's too late to change anything now. Scarlett, please, I don't know what to do anymore... Tell me, what do I do for you to give Armond the contract? All I want is to help the man I love to get through this hardship in his life. That's all I ask..."

At that moment, I could no longer recognize my cheerful and carefree friend. Her tear-strewn face felt so foreign to me. It felt like I had never really known the real her, and now her facade was peeling away to reveal her green and hideous nature.

This wasn't the Nora that I knew. Something lodged at the back of my throat as I saw her begging pathetically. Can a so-called love really change a person that drastically?

Oddly enough, I found myself asking a question that even I couldn't comprehend. "Nora, do you love Armond that much?"

She paused before admitting with a solemn weight, "Yes. He's all I want, and I'd rather die than live in a world without him."

"You're certain that he loves you? Because love isn't one-sided, nor is it unrequited. Are you absolutely sure that he loves you back?" I shot a sharp gaze at her.

My question had taken her by surprise. Her vision blurred, possibly confused as to why I asked her this.

It took her a moment before she eventually regained her focus. Despite this, there was a hint of insanity laced in her voice, “He loves me. He told me that himself, and I trust him. Why do you ask this, Scarlett? He really does love me. He does.”

I raised my chin and let out a dry, humorless laugh. “Even friendships have their limits, and you’ve crossed all of them, Nora. So you can quit your miserable begging because we’re not friends anymore. However... let’s make a bet since you’re so certain about his feelings for you. Come over tonight, and I’ll show you his true colors.”

Bitter laughter throbbed from my chest as I held her gaze. “Armond still hasn’t touched you anywhere intimately, has he?”

“Y-you,” Nora stammered. She took a moment to calm her bright pink cheeks before she muttered, “You know that his health doesn’t allow for it. Plus, you have no right to use that against me. He treats me well enough, and not all couples need that kind of intimacy to be in love.”

Chapter 1083

“How are you so certain that it’s because of health reasons?” I paused intentionally, hoping to stir anger in her. “Have you thought about why he refuses to seek medical attention, despite not being able to get it up every single time? Hmm? Have you considered that some people only react to those they have feelings for, so maybe he doesn’t love you at all? Maybe that’s why he doesn’t react sexually to you.”

At this, her eyes reddened hideously beyond recognition. She stared wide-eyed at me whilst speaking through jagged breaths, “You have no right, Scarlett! I don’t care for your lies because I know he loves me.”

Seeing her deceive herself, I couldn’t help but snicker. My shoulders raised uncontrollably as I held back a burst of roaring laughter. At this rate, she might crack.

Inhaling deeply, I composed myself before continuing, “Then there’s nothing left to say between us since you’re so sure. I’ll see you later tonight; If it turns out that he doesn’t love you, then I hope you reflect on him as a person, as well as on yourself. Don’t be swayed into living a life that someone else dictates for you.”

There was nothing more I could say, so I dropped the subject and turned the other way.

Silence engulfed us for the longest second. Eventually, she got the hint that it was pointless to beg me and gave up altogether. Before she left, she

looked me in the eyes and swore that Armond loved her, as if she were reminding not only me but herself.

I said nothing up until the moment she left.

Once she did, it was Holden's turn to glance at me with an unreadable expression. He questioned, "Call me curious, but how does an outsider like you know whether Armond is intimate with Nora? And how would you know that he can't get it up for her? Unless... you've experienced it yourself?"

My lips curled into my teeth as I rolled my eyes at him. "Nonsense! Honestly, I'm starting to wonder if your mind is filled with junk. These were things that Nora and I talked about back then between us girls. What else was I supposed to say to convince her?"

Then he threw his head back understandingly before mumbling to himself, "Does that mean my ex-girlfriends talked about me behind my back? That's crazy! I wonder what they said about me... Nah, I'm pretty sure they talked about how good I am in bed."

This guy...

Ugh... How brazen of him!

I didn't want to waste my breath on responding to that shameless man. Instead, I pulled out my phone to call Ashton but quickly realized that there was no signal. Frowning, my gaze snapped over to Holden.

“Why are you staring at me?” he raised a brow and challenged.

I raised my phone. “There’s no signal here?”

He scoffed, “Yeah. Isn’t that a given since he locked us up here? Did you really think he’d still allow you to contact Ashton or others from the outside to rescue you?”

“If you knew, then why aren’t you trying to escape?” My jaw dropped at how unbothered he seemed. He’s not an idiot, is he?

To my dismay, he shrugged in response. “Escape? Mr. Murphy will have someone in send top-notch food soon. Literally, we’re trapped in a luxurious villa with good food, something I can’t get from a regular holiday hotel. So why would I escape when I can bask in the comfort of all this?”

How optimistic.

Ugh, alright then. Any help is better than none.

I put away my phone and sat down next to him. “Holden, can you not be so gullible? We’re literally trapped here, trapped! Come on, put your greed aside and help me think of a way out.”

He tutted in response, “What for? It’s real nice in here.”

It felt like my last brain cell had snapped after hearing that. Appalled, I shook my head at him. “Forget I ever asked and just do as you please.”

Surely enough, Armond had ordered Spencer to deliver our dinner not long after. As Spencer set up the dinner table, Holden casually conversed with him. What’s even more shocking was that Spencer, our captor’s butler, responded politely before leaving us to our meal.

My lips thinned at the sight of Holden contently chowing down on his captor’s food like a fool. There really was no point convincing him to escape, and that made me lose my appetite. Instead, I looked out the window, scanning the perimeters of Armond’s ginormous villa. There was a stone wall around the villa that was way too high to climb, and the place was crawling with security. It seemed nearly impossible to sneak out of here undetected.

Unable to think of an alternative way out, I felt another headache pulsating at my temples. I whipped around to face Holden, who was chewing loudly with an oily sheen on his lips.

I couldn’t help but snap, “Holden Taylor, for the love of God, please stop eating and help me think of an escape plan! Do you want to be locked up here forever?”

“Forever?” His gaze shifted from my eyes and down to the plentiful food before him. Then he chuckled heartily, “If being that means living here and eating all this food every single day, then count me in!”

This man is hopeless.

Arghhh! Forget him then! My head ached from thinking of escape plans all day, yet I still hadn't come up with a way out. At this point, I gave up and sank into the living room's cushioned chairs.

Chapter 1084

I suddenly remembered that Sasha's parents were also locked up here. At the thought of this, I instinctively shot off the chair and paced out the door. Seeing me leave, Holden called out, “Where are you going?”

“To find out where everyone else is!” Worry seeped into my mind. Sasha's parents couldn't handle being stressed, given their old age.

He frowned. “Don't, it's pointless, and not to mention, extremely dangerous because Armond keeps his poisonous pets downstairs. He'll strangle me with his bare hands if you somehow get yourself killed. So, it's best to stay here. I'm sure someone will get us out.”

I pursed my lips at that last bit. “Is that someone the person that you're working with?” Isn't that person in Moranta? So who is he referring to?

But Holden disregarded my question. Instead, he resumed eating and even complimented Armond's private chef, singing about how tasty the food was.

Hesitantly standing by the door, I thought about the conversation earlier with Nora before announcing, "Stay here while I head out for a bit. Don't worry, Armond won't hurt me since he still needs me to get that sandalwood box. And I'm sure he's installed cameras all over this villa, so he'll be watching our every move."

Then I exited the living room and trailed down the hallway that Spencer took when he brought me up earlier. After walking for some time, I realized that I hadn't even left the fourth floor at all.

My face scrunched worryingly at the realization that Armond's villa must be built like a maze. Otherwise, he wouldn't have made it so big.

At this thought, I halted and scanned the never-ending walls around me. There were no stairways, and each door looked identical, down its gold knobs and intricate carvings. On top of that, there were many adjoined corridors. Shoot, which path did I take earlier?

My heart thundered in my chest. It swung like a mallet against my ribcage.

All the doors were shut, so I approached random ones and tried to open them. Yet, no matter how much I rattled or turned their knobs, none opened.

The booming in my chest grew incessant as if my heart might burst at any moment.

Then I heard them; despite my initial hesitance, I eventually gave in and trailed after the faint chatters of some men and women. I inhaled sharply as the voices had miraculously led me to a door whose knob could be turned.

With extreme caution, I opened the door and entered before freezing at what was inside the room.

The dimly lit room was spacious. Many stares snapped towards me, alarmed by my sudden entrance. The one person who didn't seem shocked was Armond, who lounged leisurely on a sofa as his gaze trailed from the performance at the very front of the room over to me.

He swirled a glass of blood-red wine and raised his eyebrows mockingly. "I see you've made it. Come in! Join the fun."

I was still too stunned by everything to respond. Eventually, my lips parted as I managed a simple squeak, "I..."

"Escort Ms. Stovall in." Armond's eyes fixated on me like a predator's. He placed his glass down whilst a crooked smile smeared itself across his face.

His stare sent a chill down my back, straightening every fine strand of hair on my body. I trembled helplessly as two men grabbed onto my arms and brought me closer to Armond. They then left after completing their task.

Before me, Armond crossed his legs whilst grinning with a tainted delight. "Have a seat, come watch the show since I doubt you've ever witnessed such finesse."

My feet remained firmly rooted into the ground. I refused to go over, knowing that there were about four to five mastiffs and dingos eyeing me cautiously from every corner of the room.

Thoughts raced in my mind as I tried to figure out Armond's next plan of action. Seeing how unresponsive I was, Armond's eyes narrowed furiously.

"So you prefer to stand and watch?" He spat.

But neither of us, especially myself, was prepared for what happened next.

I winced, feeling a dry and clenching ache in my stomach. Then my knees gave in, and I plopped onto all fours before a sour stream of vomit retched up my throat.

Armond's face loosened into a dull expression, save for the slight twitching of his lips that showed how entertained he was by my suffering.

A sharp stench filled the air around us. I emptied almost everything in me, yet I could still taste the sourness of rotten plums in my mouth. It took a moment before I regained my focus on him. I yelled in disbelief, "Armond, you psychopath! You're insane!"

That's right. Armond thought to himself.

Armond's eyes bore indifferently into mine. "Hmm? Have you finally decided to surrender the contract to me?"

"Do you even know what you're doing?" I felt my emotions churning as I stared down at the repulsive man before me, who sought after the contract by any means necessary.

Armond relaxed deeper into the sofa, sprawling his arms into a comfortable position. He shot a contemptuous stare at me and hissed, "Do you think Ashton would hand over the contract if I made you join them?"

"You're insane!" My face paled to a greyish disdain. Feeling my blood run cold, I stepped backward, wanting to put some distance between myself and this monster of a man.

He howled obnoxiously at the sight of me trembling. His laughter wriggled into my ears like worms as he mocked, "You're too meek to beat me in this game of chase, Scarlett. I assure you won't lose anything by giving me the contract, so why don't you hand it over, hmm?"

Damn it. Regret seeped into me as if I had been drenched with a bucket of cold water. I shouldn't have entered the room and walked so willingly into the lion's den.

Gathering whatever courage I had left, I forced myself to meet his gaze. "I'd hand over the contract to anyone without question, just not you, Armond. What you're after is the Murphy family's recognition, aren't you? Well, I won't give you that satisfaction. Look at how you destroyed the Murphy family business. That was why you sought after the trading rights to Moranta's ports; you wanted to undo the damages you've done to the Murphys.

"You're probably nervous because Mr. Murphy's already planning to remove you from your current powerful position, am I right? Well, a vile man like you will never succeed in life, no matter how capable you are or how many despicable tactics you resort to. I won't give the contract to you. I'll put you behind bars myself and allow the Murphys' next heir to restore their family's initial glory. As for you, you're better off rotting in a jail cell where you belong."

Chapter 1085

Armond gazed coldly at me, his dark eyes gradually shrouded by devilish redness. Then, his lips curved into a vicious smile as he hissed at me, "Rotting in a jail cell? Haha! Scarlett, no doubt Ashton has fallen head over heels in love with you! I'm really impressed with your courage. So far, nobody dares to talk to me like that!"

I moved backward as he approached me inch by inch, never shifting his blazing eyes away from me. Bang! The sound was followed by a slight pain on my back, indicating that I had retreated to a corner of the cage. As a wave of fear surged within me, my legs started to tremble. I gulped and was about to force myself to utter some words. However, in just a split second, he ripped my clothes into pieces and bellowed, “The rest of you, get out now!”

Everyone in the room stumbled out in an instant. As he trapped me in between his arms, I stammered in panic, “A-Armond, what do you intend to do to me? You can’t touch me! A-Ashton won’t let you off easily!”

He snickered, “Do you think that I’m afraid of him? He’s just a nobody to me! Scarlett, you must have forgotten that this is my turf. Do you think he has the right to stop me from doing anything? After all, he’s still busy investigating me in A City at the moment. Do you think he can reach here at once to come to your rescue?”

As he leaned closer to me, I was repulsed by his disgusting countenance. My entire body was shivering in utter anxiety, and I was seconds away from an emotional breakdown. I intended to raise my arms and push him away, yet he was far too strong.

The insidious man looked at me from head to toe with his ferocious eyes. After a while, he slowly took off his black suit and unbuttoned his shirt. My eyes widened as my voice quivered. “What are you doing?”

He twitched his lips and asked mockingly, “You know what I want to do now, don’t you?”

Shaking my head frantically, I tried to talk him into changing his mind by yelling, “Armond, you can’t do this! Nora is still in this villa as well. You can’t do that! You can’t!”

His lips lifted into a sly smile. “Didn’t you have a bet with her earlier? Well, this is a golden opportunity for you to test it out now. You can experience it for yourself, and you’ll find out the truth. Besides, maybe you’ll get to know whether Ashton or I have better skills too!”

“Back off!” I grimaced and growled at him. How I wish I could rip him into pieces at once, but there was nothing I could do!

He stared at me and said sarcastically, “Why’re you looking at me like that? How do you know that I’m not as well-built as Ashton? You can place your hand on my body and feel it for yourself. Come on now, don’t be shy...”

Crouching beside me, he grabbed my hands to press on his body forcefully. I tried hard to pull my hands away, yet to no avail.

I was aghast at his forcefulness, but there was nothing I could do to stop him.

My pupils constricted in profound anxiety right then. Following that, I shook my head apprehensively and yelled at him, “Armond, stop it!”

However, he smiled wryly and continued to mock me, “Are you sure you’re not keen on comparing me with Ashton? Don’t you, women, like to compare?”

Taking a deep breath, I rose abruptly and pushed him away, thinking of dashing out. However, he grabbed hold of my body effortlessly. No matter how hard I kicked and slapped him, he never loosened his tight grip on me.

Embracing my body from the back, he clung to me tightly. I shrieked hysterically, “Armond Murphy, you pervert! Let go of me! Or I swear to God, you will meet your end soon!”

“Do you know since when I’ve fallen for you? It’s love at first sight! It’s amazing, isn’t it? The very moment I met you, I told myself that I must win your heart by all means. Initially, I thought of sending you all the way to Venria, and would only appear to be your knight in shining armor when you’re in trouble. I’m sure you would’ve been touched by my gesture and fall for me easily then. Nonetheless, I’ve underestimated your love for Ashton. I’ve never expected that even after being apart for such a long time, you are still deeply in love with him!”

Unable to move at all, I panted and responded in difficulty, “Let me go! Don’t you know how humiliating it is when you said that you’ve fallen for me?”

He sneered as he became more violent due to exasperation. “Humiliating? In that case, I’ll make sure that you’ll be humiliated for the rest of your life!”

The next moment, he tore my skirt apart with brutal force. I was stupefied and yelled helplessly, “Armond, you’d better think twice. I would never forgive you if you dare to touch me! I’d rather die, and by then, Ashton would surely avenge me by ruining the Murphys!”

Armond burst into laughter that instant. “The Murphys? They are nothing to me, so don’t waste your time threatening me with the Murphys. Besides, Ashton will never be able to trace your whereabouts. Did you see this cage here? I’ve prepared it just for you, my sweet little canary! Give up now, Scarlett! There’s no use struggling because you’re mine!”

“Never!” I roared at him and bit hard on the back of his hand. He shouted in pain and loosened his tight grip. Gazing at me with a glint of ferocity in his eyes, he scoffed, “I’m sure Ashton is on the way to rescue you now, but he’s too impetuous. Impulsiveness and anxiety would always lead to something disastrous. Who knows if he would be a victim of a car accident or a plane crash? Scarlett, if any misfortune occurs to him on his way, won’t you feel guilty? After all, he came here because of you...”

“Armond Murphy, you’re a freakin’ lunatic!” Instantaneously, I was panic-stricken at the sight of his nonchalance. On the brink of tears, I could feel the throbbing pain of my heart. No! I can’t let anything happen to Ashton! I won’t!

Chapter 1086

“Don’t hurt him! You just want the contract, don’t you? I promise to give you that as long as you don’t threaten him!” I mustered my courage to grip his hand and look at his grim face. “Armond, I know you only wanted the contract, so I will give it to you. Just please don’t hurt Ashton, okay?” I pleaded.

Right that instant, there was a sudden change in his expression. He laughed scornfully at me, “My, my, Scarlett, you can only blame yourself for messing things up. Initially, it never crossed my mind to hurt you or even using you to threaten Ashton. However, you’ve spoiled my mood, and now, I’ve changed my mind.”

After that, he rose and opened the door of the cage. He stepped out and then picked up the phone on the floor to hand it to me. Squinting his eyes, he said grimly, “Call Ashton now and ask him to pass the contract to Linda. Do you get it?”

I cooled myself down, took the phone from him, and called Ashton. He answered my call almost immediately.

Upon hearing his voice, my heart flinched because of the complex emotions. Suppressing my uneasiness, I asked, “Ashton, where are you now? How are you? Is everything going on well?”

“I’m fine. Don’t worry, Don’t be afraid!” His deep, calming voice seemed to soothe my anxiety.

Nothing is more important than his safety! I would do anything, just so that he's safe and sound...

Meanwhile, Armond was staring at me with a grim look on his face. He was waiting for me to bring up the topic on the contract. Pursing my lips, I asked Ashton tactfully, "Ashton, do you still remember where I put the sandalwood box from Grandma?"

On the other end of the line, Ashton seemed to be stunned for a moment before replying, "It's at home. Weren't you always aware of that?"

I knitted my brows as I started to ponder. After that incident, he never talked about the contract. Hence, I didn't know where it was all this while! "Alright, I'm not at home right now, but I'll get someone to go and get it later. You take care over there! Come back only after getting your matters resolved, alright?"

He replied gently, "Alright. I'm almost done with it anyway. Anyway, are you okay with being alone for now?"

Ignoring how Armond was staring at me, I pursed my lips and replied, "Yeah, I'm fine. I just kind of miss you, but it's alright... I'll wait for you at home. Do come back soon!"

Before I could finish my words, Armond stretched out his arm to snatch the phone away from me. Fortunately, I managed to dodge, so Ashton did not

sense anything awry. He paused momentarily before replying, "Alright. I miss you too!"

Glancing at Armond, who was looking intently at me, like a beast ready to pounce on its prey, I told Ashton, "Take care of yourself. I'll see you soon."

He replied gently, "Alright, you too!"

After hanging up the phone, Armond snatched it from me instantly and smashed it onto the floor. I was dumbfounded to see the phone shatter into pieces right in front of my eyes.

Nevertheless, I remained silent and tried to keep a cool head. He turned and glared at me with eyes that were blazing with anger. The next moment, he dragged me from the floor and flung me onto the sofa.

Before I could react, he had pinned me down and started to run his hands all over my body, despite my struggles.

As he continued to run his disgusting hands all over my body, I almost broke down. I growled at him, "Armond, I've asked about the thing that you want. It's at the villa. You can ask your men to go and get it any time. So why are you still doing this to me, you b*stard?"

I tried to push him away by force and threw punches at him, yet he was not affected at all. It was as if he was a robot without any sense of pain.

Seeing that he had totally lost his mind, I was panicked that the worst would befall me at any time. I could not understand why he was treating me so roughly and domineeringly all of a sudden.

At that thought, I burst into tears and wailed helplessly “Armond, you b*stard! Let me go. I beg you! Please let me go!” Nevertheless, he was not moved at all.

A surge of despair welled up from within me. At that very moment, I felt like ending my own life on the spot so everything would come to an end.

Bang! In an instant, it was as if the heaviness above my body was being lifted. To my astonishment, Armond’s body slanted to one side and fell onto the floor. Within such a short span of time, there was a twist in the current situation.

He passed out and sprawled on the floor with his face down, like a lifeless body. Blood started to ooze from the back of his head. I held my breath as I raised my head instinctively. Nora’s face turned pale as she was standing motionless with something in her hand. I only realized that she had bashed him hard on the head.

Everything happened in a flash, and it was just like a dream for me.

Clang! The bottle slipped from Nora’s hands and shattered into pieces on the floor. She looked at me in bewilderment, then turned to look at Armond. Blood drained from her face as she stuttered, “I-I never thought of rescuing you, I...”

I climbed up from the floor and grabbed hold of her, thinking of fleeing at once. Nevertheless, I froze in my tracks when we were about to reach the main door. Spencer was blocking our way with a few muscular bodyguards.

Chapter 1087

“Where do you both intend to go?”

Spencer asked courteously as he smiled at us. Looking at his unusual demeanor under such circumstances, my heart skipped a beat.

Nora and I grabbed hold of each other and looked at Spencer persuasively. “We have to leave this place. Spencer, please let us go!” I pleaded with him.

It was as if Spencer totally did not catch what I said. At the sight of Armond, who was lying on the floor in disheveled clothes, he shot me an indifferent glance and instructed the bodyguards, “Go check on Mr. Murphy!”

Two of the bodyguards moved toward Armond swiftly and took some time to check on him before they carried him away cautiously. Meanwhile, I was locked up in the room again with Nora.

We cowered in one corner and were still traumatized by the terrifying events that happened a while ago. Nora stared into space for quite a while before she came to her senses. Gazing at me silently for some time, there seemed to be something that she wished to tell me.

I looked at her and thanked her sincerely, "I really appreciate you coming to my rescue just now. Don't worry. Ashton will surely try his best to save us."

However, Nora continued to gaze at me in silence with a mixture of emotions in her eyes. After a while, she finally broke the silence. "I've known right from the beginning that Armond has never fallen for me, and I'm just a nobody to him. Yet, I choose to lie to myself all this while. I thought that if I follow him wherever he went and clung to him with perseverance, he would be able to notice me one day. To be frank, he actually treats me quite well whenever you're around. He buys me things and is really considerate, although he would never touch me."

"For instance, when we were first together, he used to smoke in the car. I was sick of the smell and asked him about it. From that day onwards, he attempted to quit smoking. When we stay at the hotel and he feels like smoking, he would rather open the window and smoke with his head poked outside so I won't smell the smoke in the room. Don't you think that he really minds about what I said? If he didn't fall for me, he would not be so considerate of me. Scarlett, I'm pretty sure that he was really in love with me at that time. I'm not making up a story. I just don't understand why he has turned into such a ruthless person all of a sudden. However, I'm sure he really did love me before! I'm telling the truth, and I really felt it at that time!" she continued to mumble with a dreamy look on her face.

At the sight of her bitter smile and teary eyes, I was at a loss for words to console her. Armond probably has really fallen in love with her before. Yet why did he say those meaningless words to me just now?

If Nora was right about him having feelings for her, why can't he continue to cherish such a nice girl like her?

Nora cowered in one corner, wrapping herself in her own arms. Feeling upset about her current melancholic state, I did not know how I could console her and cheer her up. Letting out a deep breath, I patted her gently and said softly, "Nora, I might not have the right to give you advice, as I myself can't handle my relationship well too. I'm overconfident at times and tend to put myself in hot water, putting the person I love at risk as well. As for Armond, I'm sorry that I'm unable to put myself in his shoes, just like how you are doing. We're definitely in a different stance as he's my foe. You also witnessed how he was trying to assault me earlier, didn't you? I understand how you are deeply in love with him, and I've no right to persuade you to fight against him with me. Yet he must pay the price for the hideous deed that he has committed!"

I paused as my heart throbbed in pain when a girl's figure flashed across my mind. "You know about Hailey, don't you? The heart that keeps her alive now was actually sold to her father through a business trade between Armond and him. Do you know that an innocent girl was sacrificed just to keep her alive? Armond had indeed applied the most brutal way to fulfill the deal with her father. Consequently, poor Hailey ends up living in guilt. To me, he's really a cold-blooded murderer in a way. Furthermore, countless

children in the villages have perished in his hands miserably. It's really unfair for them! Nora, I've witnessed all these with my own eyes. You must really think properly and make the right decision. I'm sure that you really love him, but he can't be easily forgiven for his misdeeds."

Nora looked at me with eyes welled up in tears, "What do you want me to do? I mean, what else can I do now? I'm sure he won't trust me anymore from now onwards. Thus, there's no chance for me to set him up again. Look at these beasts. They have just taken a meal and are sleeping soundly at the moment. However, when they are awake and hungry later, we might become their food to fill up their stomach at any time!"

She was right, but I was reluctant to give up easily on any chances to survive. I tried to motivate her by saying, "I know it's really challenging for us to survive. Even so, we must be united to look for ways to leave this place. Since you're able to come all the way here, it proves that you know pretty well about this villa. Hence, you'll be able to find the way out, right?"

She was dumbfounded for a while before she nodded slowly again. "What do you want me to do?"

"Ashton will be here in a while. However, he would not be able to enter this villa as the wall is too high. Thus, the only way for us to get out of here is to look for Holden so he can team up with Ashton to rescue us!"

Silence ensued for a moment before she replied hesitantly, "I've stayed here for quite some time. Even though I can't assure that I know every corner of this villa well, but I guess there's still no problem for me to give a try."

Then, she turned to look at me abruptly, “But, Scarlett, you have to be prepared to have your life at risk if you intend to get out of here. Do you think you can accept it?”

Chapter 1088

I was stunned and baffled by what she meant. She gestured to me as she stole a glance at the mastiff sleeping soundly in the cage.

It suddenly struck me that she was hinting that the mastiff could strike us at any time. The very thought of the mastiff pounding on me brought me out in a cold sweat. Restraining my fear, I calmed myself down and replied firmly, “Yes, I can!”

She nodded and handed me a knife. “All the best to you! Take care of your own safety!” she warned me and approached the cage to unlock the main door.

Once the main door was unlocked, the mastiffs were still motionless and sleeping soundly.

Standing near the cage, Nora took a deep breath and incapacitated one of the mastiffs with an electric baton.

In a split second, the mastiff howled in pain as the electric baton inflicted electric shock on it. She then moved aside swiftly.

That one mastiff's deafening howl triggered the other mastiffs as well. They woke up one by one and glared at both of us viciously.

Raising the electric baton in her hand, Nora looked at me with chattering teeth. With a quivering voice, she reminded me, "Grab hold of the knife tightly and protect yourself!"

I nodded as my heart pounded tremendously with fear.

All the mastiffs moved out slowly from the cage and fixed their ferocious gazes on us as they snarled at us.

The mastiff which was incapacitated by Nora earlier approached her as if it knew that Nora was the one who had woken it up earlier.

Looking at Nora, I was scared stiff as I asked, "Nora, what are we supposed to do?"

Still holding the electric baton, she gritted out, "Scarlett, I mentioned earlier that your life would be at risk. So... I don't know what we're supposed to do next!"

At the same time, another mastiff was moving toward me, making my whole body tremble with fear. I stuck myself closer to the wall, with the knife tightly clenched in my hand as I stepped back.

The enraged mastiff's intimidating stare sent chills down my spine. Even though Nora mentioned that the mastiffs had just taken their meals and would not eat us, it didn't mean that they wouldn't bite us! For some reason, I felt like we would be easily torn into pieces with just one deadly bite!

The sight of me holding the knife must have provoked the mastiff in a way. That explained why its agitation was triggered at once, and it was ready to pounce on me. Standing rooted to the floor, I could only shut my eyes and screamed at the top of my lungs. At the same time, I could not help mourning for myself at the devastating fate which would befall me soon.

At the eleventh hour, I was taken aback by the ear-piercing sound of gunshots. Thud! The beast, which was still pouncing on me seconds ago, collapsed onto the floor. It writhed in pain and lay motionless on the floor within seconds.

What a close shave! I was still petrified and remained frozen. By then, all the other mastiffs were also lying motionless on the floor, with a syringe poked onto each of their necks. They were apparently injected with some sort of anesthesia.

“Both of you shouldn’t have infuriated them!” Spencer said in an icy-cold tone as he glared at us. He was standing with the other bodyguards at the main entrance of the room.

Nora and I nodded in embarrassment. Meanwhile, Nora looked at Spencer with her teary eyes and asked nervously, “Spencer, how is Armond? Has he woken up? Can I go and see him?”

Spencer frowned slightly as he replied, “Mr. Murphy has just woken up. Ms. Oberick, don’t worry, he’s fine.”

Heaving a sigh of relief, Nora asked Spencer pitifully, “Spencer, can you bring us to see him? I’m really sorry for what I’ve done just now. But it was never my intention to hurt him. I just really love him, so I was blinded by my jealousy. I couldn’t watch him do that to another woman...”

Spencer let out a deep sigh and said, “Let’s go. Just don’t be so impetuous next time!”

After that, he led us out of the room without saying anything. Unexpectedly, the mastiffs were left unattended on the floor.

Once we stepped out of the room, it was locked again. Trailing behind Spencer, Nora gazed at me meaningfully, hinting me to find ways to escape.

I nodded silently at her.

As Armond's villa was too spacious, I could not guarantee that I would not end up losing my way here. Nevertheless, I could only try my luck as that was the only chance for me to escape at the moment.

Before I could think of a brilliant idea, the siren blared abruptly with a high-pitched sound. I immediately covered my ears.

Spencer furrowed his brows and turned to look at the bodyguards behind him. They left at once after he threw them a glance. I presumed that he had instructed the bodyguards to attend to some urgent matters in the villa.

I exchanged a look with Nora right then. She asked Spencer inquisitively, "Spencer, why is the siren blaring suddenly? What happened?"

There was a momentary weird look on Spencer's face before he squeezed a smile. "Ms. Oberick, you don't have to worry so much. The bodyguards are checking on it now. It's probably caused by the system which malfunctions at times. Here, let me lead you to Mr. Murphy."

Nora nodded constantly and asked deliberately, "Armond is currently in his bedroom, right? I'll go and see him now." After that, she trotted eagerly toward his bedroom. Fearing that she would unintentionally stir up any troubles again, Spencer quickened his pace to catch her up. Meanwhile, I purposely slowed down behind them, trying to grab the golden opportunity to wander around by myself in order to find ways to flee the horrible place.

Chapter 1089

Seeing that, I strode forward, following the route that Nora had told me in advance. Only the fourth floor of Armond's villa was occupied at that moment. Nonetheless, it was exceptionally challenging to locate the stairway leading downstairs because the place was humungous. He might have possibly built it that way on purpose to make it difficult for people to find the staircase.

Remembering what Nora told me, I managed to locate the exit and quickly headed downstairs to the living room.

I was stunned to see several hundred policemen besieging the villa. Right then, I also noticed Ashton in their midst.

It had been a few days since I last saw him. That man stuck out like a sore thumb in the crowd, wearing a dark-colored trench coat, looking as dapper as ever.

I was taken aback for a moment until our gazes were fixated on each other. A fuzzy feeling arose in me, and I ran toward him without the slightest hesitation.

Oh, how I've missed him and longed for his embrace these days. My overwhelming emotions fueled me to dash toward him relentlessly like waves hitting the shore.

Simultaneously, he was darting across the room to me. Nothing else mattered at that moment besides falling into his arms and hugging him tightly with my head buried in his chest.

The reunion made me tear up. "I thought I'll never be able to see you again in this lifetime. I thought I'll have to face everything on my own this time. I thought you'll never come. I..."

"Silly girl!" He assured me in a low voice while hugging me, "How could I let you face this alone? Not now and never will."

Resting in his arms, my body started to warm up as I calmed down. I could feel my heart beating normally again with him beside me, and that felt good. I felt like I owned the whole world only when he's around.

Moments later, he said gently, "Let's get this mess sorted."

I nodded in agreement. After all, the main priority was to settle the matters at hand.

At that moment, the policemen had the entire villa surrounded. The person-in-charge consulted Ashton, "Mr. Fuller, should we barge in?"

Ashton nodded and ordered, "Locate Armond at once while controlling the rest. Try to keep the site as it is and reduce any possible damage to the least."

"Noted!"

Subsequently, the troop entered the villa. I reminded them, "Armond's pets are on the third floor. Beware, they are mostly venomous snakes and scorpions."

The leader of the troop acknowledged, "Thanks for the reminder, Mrs. Fuller."

Meanwhile, I remained outside of the villa with Ashton. His composure piqued my curiosity. "When did you return? It takes at least four hours to get from A City to K City."

He stared at me and replied, "Before Holden came here with you, he sent me a message. To be honest, Armond wouldn't call you here for nothing. If he failed to get the sandalwood box, it's expected of him to detain you. Moreover, the Murphys are anxious to obtain the contract. Hence, it's a necessary step for him to look for you."

"So, you came back as soon as you got the message?"

He nodded. "When Holden has gotten full knowledge of the situation in the villa, I brought in the police. With Holden's help, Armond will definitely go to jail."

Nodding my head, I continued asking, "How did the investigation go in A City? Did you manage to find some solid evidence? Did they confess?"

"Yes, they've confessed. Joseph will follow up with the rest."

This chapter was finally closed.

Earlier, Armond fell unconscious after getting hit by Nora. Hence, the raid was conducted successfully, where items found included numerous Class 1 protected wildlife species and weapons.

Charged with a crime, Armond was taken away directly. On the other hand, the others at the villa were required to record their affidavits before being released. As for the Murphys, they were all affected because of what Armond did.

The less-than-ideal stock market plunged even further, resulting in a severe crash. In the end, Armond was held in police custody.

After a tiring night, I woke up to a loving Ashton next to me.

He looked me in the eyes and curled his lips. "You're up?"

I nodded as I let out a coquettish smile unknowingly. Snuggling in his embrace, I said with a hoarse voice, "I dreamt of you last night and thought that you've left for a business trip. I was thinking to myself how disappointed I'd be if I couldn't see you when I woke up. Thankfully, you're here with me, and this makes me glad."

He chuckled. "You can come with me on all of my business trips in the future. It's always a real bummer when I don't see you the moment I open my eyes in the morning and when my arms hug nothing at night."

I buried my face against his chest. "Now that Armond's case is settled, isn't Rachel taking care of everything in A City? You can now remain here instead of traveling to A City and Moranta. Oh, by the way, Nick is getting married soon."

Chapter 1090

He nodded and then cast me an intense gaze. "We'll organize our very own wedding as soon as Nick is done with his. How's that?"

He had me flabbergasted. "Our wedding? Didn't we have one already? It's so troublesome to do it all over again. It's better the channel the energy to plan for a trip when the weather gets better soon. It's been ages since I traveled."

He laughed. "We'll surely go traveling, but only after our wedding."

Squinting my eyes, I hugged him. "Let's think about that in the near future. Any ceremony that we hold right now is considered our anniversary celebration."

Chilling with him on the bed made me feel sleepy. At that thought, I checked the time and realized that it was already noon. Lifting my head, I asked, "Are you hungry?"

Arching his brows, he responded with more questions, "What about you? Are you hungry?"

I admitted, "Quite. But, we don't have that many groceries at home, and the helper isn't around. What shall we have for lunch?"

After pondering for a while, I suggested, "Why don't we eat at Aunt Sally's? Apparently, she's bought a new place in the city, and it's quite near to K University. We can visit the university library thereafter and spend some time reading. How does that sound?"

He brushed his finger lightly on my nose and replied affectionately, "Sounds like a plan."

I sat on the bed briefly to clear my mind. After showering and getting dressed, Ashton walked out from the walk-in closet.

He saw me and asked, “Are you still sleepy?”

I shook my head. “Not anymore. Any reason why you’re not wearing your black jacket anymore?” I was surprised to see him wearing something that was not black. His first?

He carried me up and lugged me around his waist, then placed me on the bathroom countertop. With a smile, he handed over the toothbrush to me, with the toothpaste squeezed in advance. “Don’t you like seeing me wearing other colors?”

In a muffled voice, I explained, “It’s not that. It’s refreshing to see you in other colors. You look so handsome that I’m falling head over heels for you. I’ll doll up just to match you when we go out.”

Hugging me, he stared at my reflection in the mirror. “You’re dressing up because you’re going to the university!”

I giggled. “That’s one of the reasons. However, my first priority is to look good for you.” After gargling, I struggled to get off him. He obliged and sat me on the toilet seat.

Frowning, I asked, "Hey, I'm not done."

His gaze fell on my feet, then he reminded, "The floor is cold. Don't walk around barefooted. I'll bring you your slippers. Stay here."

After a while, he came back with a pair of slippers and put them on for me. Pecking my cheek, he said, "I'll go make some breakfast. Come down when you're ready."

I nodded and continued washing up.

After I had freshened up, I searched high and low in the walk-in closet and found a lovely pink dress for the occasion. I wondered where Ashton got it from since it had just been newly released by a famous brand early this year. The style was quite ladylike, different from my regular picks. Wearing it to see Sally would be like a breath of fresh air.

After getting dressed, I put on some make-up and blow-dried my hair. It had been a long time since I glammed up, and my hair had grown to reach my waist. Sitting at my dressing table, I simpered as I was quite pleased with my hairdo.

Frankly speaking, I didn't remember losing any hair. It was still as dark and thick as ever. My skin and smile looked brighter, and in fact, I appeared more relaxed than before.

I had heard from some elderly people that when a couple became more charming, it was a sign that they were getting more compatible, and things would only get better.

Now that I thought about it, it did have some truth in it. Ashton and I had been together for years. Hence, we'd seen it all and also endured multiple hardships. Yet, things seemed to have just begun falling into place, and everything was just blissful.

Not only that, but we were also seemingly becoming better versions of ourselves. When I reminisced about the past, there were only sweet memories.

By the time I got downstairs, Ashton had prepared some fish for breakfast. He waved at me excitedly while reaching out for the utensils. "Come over and try this!" Everything seemed so natural.

However, I felt a little surreal when our stories unfolded so well. Although Ashton and I had just started our relationship not too long ago, I felt that we had been through multiple cycles of ups and downs.

As I was staring into space blankly, he smiled at me and asked, "What are you thinking about? Come over."

His words interrupted my thoughts. I took a seat at the dining table and then looked at him in disbelief. "When did you learn how to make fish soup? It looks delicious."

